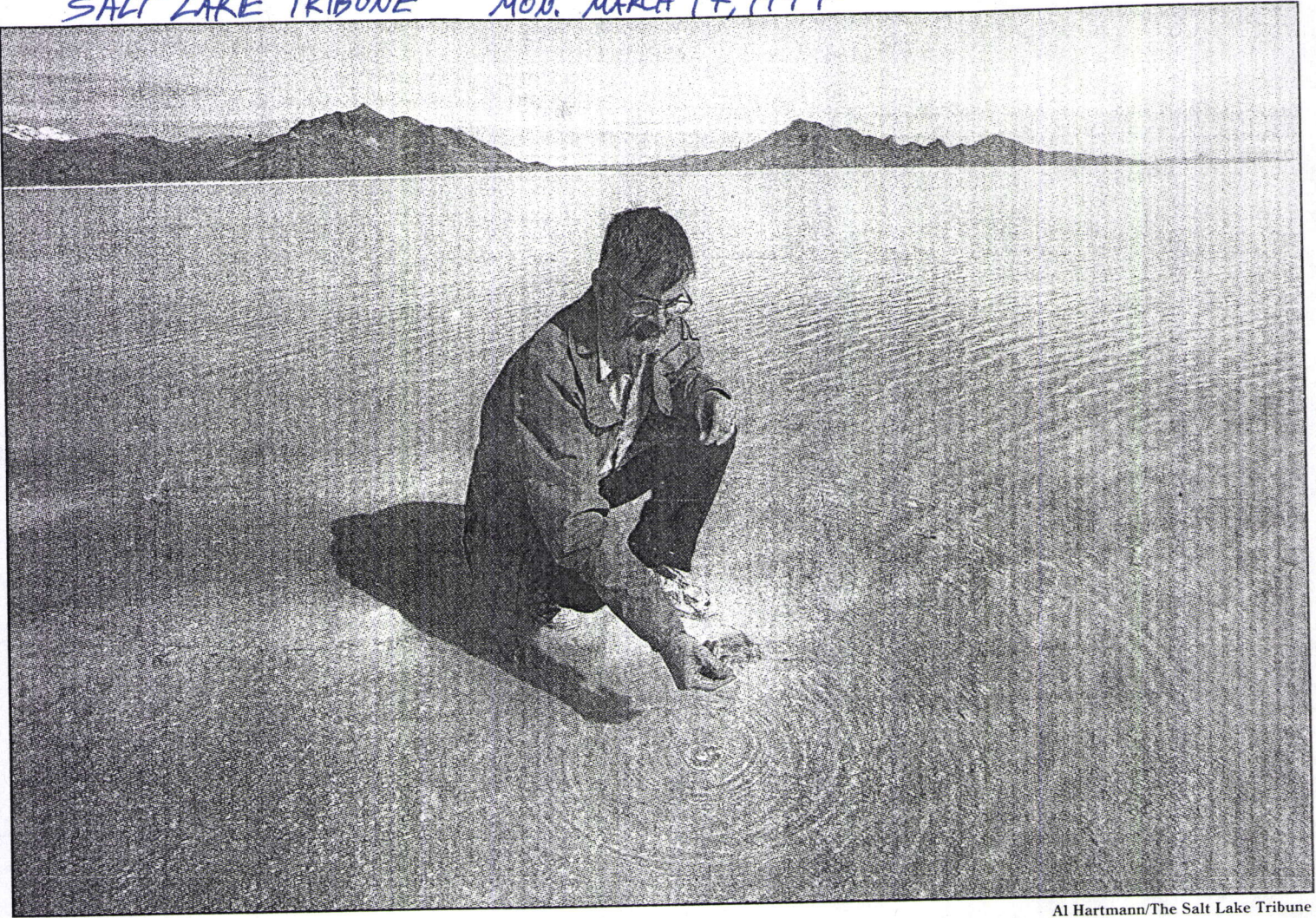


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SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

MON. MARCH 17, 1997



Al Hartmann/The Salt Lake Tribune

BLM geologist Phil Allard checks shallow water from rain and mountain snow runoff that sits on top of the Bonneville Salt Flats. A BLM project will pump saltwater onto the flats this week in an attempt to rebuild the eroding salt crust.

*Bonneville Preservation Team Prepares to Flood the Flats, But . . .*

## Will Experiment Be Worth Its Salt?

BY CHRISTOPHER SMITH

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

**BONNEVILLE SALT FLATS** — A first-ever attempt at restoring the thinning white salt crust that has made this barren plain internationally renowned begins this week.

Thousands of gallons of brine — water saturated with sodium chloride — will be pumped onto the flats in the hope summer evaporation will leave behind a thicker coating of salt over the milk-chocolate mud of this prehistoric lake bed 130 miles west of Salt Lake City.

The experimental "salt lay down" pro-

ject culminates years of studies and controversy over how to save the Bonneville Salt Flats, a North American natural wonder craved by Hollywood for its alien emptiness and by hot rodders for its smooth, cool, tire-friendly surface.

"There's not the same emotional connection to the Bonneville Salt Flats that people might have to the redwood forests or the Grand Canyon, but it's just as worthy of protection," says Phil Allard, the Bureau of Land Management geologist who is overseeing the salt-restoration experiment. "If we don't do anything, it's quite possible that eventually the Bonneville Salt Flats will be nothing but mud."

Wetter weather during the past 30 years and nearby potash-extraction mining apparently have eroded the depth of the salt crust that covers the 28-square-mile (about the size of Miami) flats in the midst of the 900-square-mile Great Salt Lake playa. As early as the 1950s, the garage mechanics who made pilgrimages here to wring every last mile-per-hour out of their speedsters complained about the diminishing depth of the salt crust.

Racers long have blamed Reilly Industries and its mining predecessors at near-

See **EXPERIMENT**, Page A-4

## Experts Divided on Effect of a Bigger NATO



**NATO men**

In July, President C. Poland, Hungary, and



In Tirana, 2,000 people chanted "Albania" and waved flowers or linked hands in Skanderbeg Square, where the first anti-government protests were staged in December following the collapse of investment funds promising high yields.

ter the government, facing a total collar of its military and its armor. an to pass out guns to men w. s. answered to an appeal to form a new citizen force to restore order.

A peace rally in the main city square drew about 3,000 residents.

The government declared Sunday a national day of mourning. Flags flew at half staff for the dozens of people who have died or were wounded in rebellions, touched off by financial scandals, that have rippled through this Maryland-size country in the past

two weeks.

The crowd held a showing a bloody hand against violence, trait of a teen-ager killed last week.

Nurie Rica, 45, said first time her 3-year-

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## Experiment: Will Flood Be Worth Its Salt?

■ Continued from A-1

by Wendover for robbing the saline deposits from the flats. Canals have been dug and flooded to absorb minerals from the lake bed, then the brine is pumped into evaporation ponds to extract potash (used in fertilizer), leaving behind salt, considered a waste by-product by miners. Potash mining started in 1916 at the flats, then known as the Salduro Salt Marsh.

BLM is not sure that potash mining is solely to blame for the depletion of the salt crust, with researchers contending climate also plays a significant role. A detailed scientific study by the U.S. Geological Survey on the problem is due for release this year, but it is doubtful the findings will point to a definitive cause for the salt depletion.

Reilly, however, has agreed to work to return the salt in its evaporation ponds to the flats, and it signed an agreement to participate in the salt lay-down project. The Indianapolis-based company is spending an estimated \$800,000 to build the brine pumping and delivery system that is expected to begin operating this week.

"I'm convinced Reilly is operating in good faith," says Allard. "There's been a lot of concern on the part of the racers that we have not been in operations sooner this year, but this is a big, complicated project with a lot to orchestrate."

Rick Vesco of Brigham City, chairman of the racer/preservationist group Save The Salt, says racers are frustrated that the lay-down project, scheduled to be operating in January, has yet to pump the first gallon of brine onto the flats.

"Right now, we are within one

month of not being able to pump," says Vesco. "From what I could see, they're still behind schedule of getting this ready to go."

A higher-voltage power line still must be strung to support new pumps supplying fresh water from the north side of Interstate 80 to the salt-saturation pond on the south side of the freeway. But existing pumps were operating Friday, supplying water to the brine pond and Allard was optimistic Reilly could begin pumping brine from the pond back under the freeway to the salt flats this week.

"I'm pretty confident this will work and provide us with a chance to learn the operating parameters of this system before we go into a full pumping season," he says. During the next four years, Reilly will operate the brine-pumping system from October into April at an annual maintenance cost of \$50,000.

During those months, 1.5 million tons of salt will be deposited over the flats by the brine-pumping system. When the water evaporates, scientists estimate four-tenths of an inch of new salt crust will remain.

But nothing is guaranteed. Although the process replicates the natural winter flooding of the flats from precipitation, no one is sure whether the brine salt will have the same adhesive qualities as the natural crust, or whether it will dry in bumpy lumps instead of the angel-hair crystals that occur naturally.

Allard acknowledges scientists aren't sure what adding more water into the flats ecosystem will do.

"One of the big unknowns is how much evaporation we are going to get," he says. "So much depends on the spring weather."

Beyond repairing one of America's most famous dragstrips, the salt lay-down project will reconnect the halves of the basin that were severed by the construction of I-80 and the Western Pacific railroad line.

Restoring the flow of water be-

*"The salt flats have a sense of wilderness in biblical terms."*

**Phil Allard**

BLM geologist

tween the north and south halves may enhance the natural cycle of snow and rain bringing salt down from the surrounding mountains into the basin, then evaporating to leave the crust of 99 percent pure sodium chloride.

"This is a unique environmental setting on a scale that's hard to comprehend," Allard says while wandering across the brilliant expanse, portions of which are covered by natural winter flooding. "The salt flats have a sense of wilderness in biblical terms. Out here, it's not just unwelcoming to people, it's flat inhospitable."

## Spouses Can Sue When Mate Is Injured

■ Continued from A-1

Resistance from health-care providers and insurance companies killed a similar bill in 1996. But this year, opponents decided "it was only a matter of time" before such claims were approved, said John T. Nielsen, a lobbyist for the Utah Health Insurance Association.

Instead, the industries and Fox negotiated to have such awards fall under a \$250,000 cap on damages for pain and suffering in medical malpractice litigation. Fox, who works for the Salt Lake City law firm Callister, Nebeker & McCullough, notes the firm had clients on both sides of the issue.

Claims for loss of have a flatly sexist hi

Under English co only husbands could b tium claims for the lo affection of a wife, in

A wife was con property of a husba he could sue someon gently harmed her. A ry was seen as harm band, who lost her perhaps incurred me

Wives had no legal for their own injuries of a husband's servic

"A woman who lo cause she was injure sue to get back the w: plained Salt Lake Ci Richard Henriksen Jr husband's wage loss. could sue."

Utah formally ado common law in 18 same year, state law acted the Married V — which gave wives sue for their own inj

The wording of the husband's right to s consortium, the Ut Court said in two 197 and Utah wives ne right to such claims.

But Henriksen, the Hackfords, cha court's interpretation Hackford's 1982 i Hackford was worki of a Western Petrol in Naples (near Ver head hit a low-lying

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